(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise in view of (c) above.

(e) and (f) A revival plan was submitted by the HPF Officers Association to Operating Agency (ICICI). This was discussed by BIFR in its meeting held on 26.6.97 and was not found viable.

Mahila Pradhan Kshetriya Yojna

667. SHRI SHATRUGHAN PRASAD SINGH: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Mahila Pradhan Kshetriya Bachat Yojna (Women Oriented Regional Savings Scheme) is effective since April, 1974 in National Saving Organisation under his Ministry;

(b) if so, whether the uniform rules and procedures are followed under the said scheme throughout the country;

(c) if so, whether different rules have been framed for the important works such as appointment of agents, supply of S.L.A.A. S-5 and Commission papers etc. under Women oriented Regional Savings Scheme in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and other States;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(e) whether the Government propose to provide the said scheme throughout the country under uniform rules and procedure?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): The Mahila Pradhan Kshetriya Bachat Yojna (MPKBY) was introduced from April, 1972.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) Yes, Sir. The Government propose to continue to operate the said Scheme throughout the country with uniform rules and procedures.

Customs Duty on Telecom Equipment

668. SHRI G. VENKAT SWAMY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have recently imposed customs duties on Telecom equipment;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether his Ministry had received any communication for special concession including deemed status to the domestic Manufacturing Industry from the Department of Telecommunication;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether the submission of that Department was taken into consideration before imposing the customs duties on telecom equipments; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) and (b) Government have reduced basic customs duty on specified telecom equipment to 20% and have exempted them from additional duty of customs, vide notification 51/97-Cus. dated 2.6.97. The concessional duty benefits are available if such equipments are imported by persons licensed by Department of Telecommunications for the purpose of providing basic telecom service, cellular mobile service, paging service and value added services.

(c) to (f) Finance Ministry had received recommendations from Department of Telecommunication (DOT) that concessional customs duty may be provided to only those equipment which are currently not manufactured indigenously and that customs duty on raw materials/components required for the manufacture of such equipment should also be reduced to zero in order to encourage their local manufacture. Alternatively, indigenously manufactured equipment may be exempted from excise duty and deemed export status may be given to indigenous equipment manufacturers. Further, facility of concessional customs duty may be given only to those companies which have been duly licensed by DOT.

These recommendations were taken into consideration. Accordingly, basic customs duty on specified telecom equipment listed in notification 51/97-Cus. dated 2.6.97 was reduced to 20%. These equipments were also exempted from additional duty of customs. Request for reduction of customs duties on raw materials/components of telecom equipment specified in the aforementioned notification is under consideration.

Induetrial Corridor in Andhra Pradeeh

669. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

SHRI SUBRAHMANYAM NELAVALA:

Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have decided to develop Vishakhapatnam-Kakinada as an "Industrial Corridor";

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether any arrangements are being made to supply 15 mgd water from the Yeleru canal and uninterrupted power to the industries;

(d) whether an Industrial Park is also bsing developed at Pravada on an area of 3,500 acres for creation of infrastructure;

(e) whether any concrete programme of action has

been prepared for Visakhapatnam-Kakinada to be developed as an industrial corridor; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (f) Ministry of Industry have no plans to develop Visakhapatnam-Kakinada as Industrial Corridor or an Industrial Park at Pravada.

[Translation]

Regional and Technical Development Centre

670. SHRI SUSHIL CHANDRA: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be plesed to state:

(a) whether the Regional and Technical Development Centre has been set up in Bhopal where women victims of Bhopal gas tragedy have also been taking the benefit of training imparted by the Centre and new designs and techniques are being developed by them;

(b) whether any proposal to shift this centre from Bhopal to elsewhere is under consideration of the Government; and

(c) if so, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI R.L. JALAPPA): (a) The Regional Design and Technical Development Centre at Bhopal is engaged in developing new designs and techniques and it dissemination amongst artisans, including the women victims of Bhopal gas tragedy.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) Does not arise.

[English]

Trade Deficit

671. SHRIMATI LAKSHMI PANABAKA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the total trade deficit during 1996-97;

(b) to what extent it was more in comparison with the previous year 1995-96 with reasons therefor;

(c) whether any concrete measures in this regard have been worked out for improving the trade deficit during 1997-98; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) and (b) As per DGCI&S data, the trade deficit in 1996-97 was US $ 5442 million as against US $ 4881 million in 1995-96. While import growth also decelerated in 1996-97 the deceleration was faster for exports. This asymmetry in growth rates, together with a higher base for imports resulted in a widening of the trade deficit by US $ 561 million in 1996-97. The deceleration in the rate of growth of exports was partly due to an overall decline in the growth of world trade and some sector specific reasons.

(c) and (d) The key to reducing trade deficit lies in accelerated export growth. Export promotion measures are continuously being taken by the Government through policy and promotional schemes. These include simplification of Export Import Policy procedures, improving efficiency and competitiveness, focussing on quality and technology upgradation, efforts to actively involve the State Governments in export promotion. Export promotion is a continuing activity based on interaction with industry, trade and other export promotional institutions.

Growth Rate

672. SHRI BHAKTA CHARAN DAS: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether RBI has projected 6.8% growth rate in GDP for the year 1996-97;

(b) if so, whether this rate is lower than the previous year;

(c) if so, the reasons for lower percentage of growth rate in GDP during 1996-97;

(d) whether RBI has also expressed concern over show down in industrial growth, high interest rates; and decline in export growth; and

(e) if so, the measures being taken by the Government to improve the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) to (c) The Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) makes the projections for growth rate in GDP. However, Reserve Bank of India in its Monetary & Credit Policy announcemnt for first half 1997-98 has indicated that real GDP is expected to have grown by 6.8% in 1996-97. This is consistent with the revised estimate of GDP for the year 1996-97 released by the CSO in July 1997. The growth rate of GDP for 1996-97 is marginally lower than that of 7.1 per cent registered in 1995-96. The sectoral break-down of the growth rates in 1995-96 and 1996-97 is indicated in the attached statement.

(d) and (e) The Reserve Bank of India in its Monetary and Credit Policy for the first half of 1997-98, has mentioned about slowing down of industrial growth in the economy. As regards the interest rate structure, the policy has noted a general lowering down of rates of interest on different money market instruments. The Reserve Bank of India has also announced reduction in the bank rate. The Policy has also observed a strong need for improving exports and ensuring imports to sustain growth momentum. The Government has announced several measures in the Budget 1997-98 to boost production and exports and to improve the growth rate of GDP. These measures include reduction and rationalisation of income tax, corporate tax, excise and customs duties.